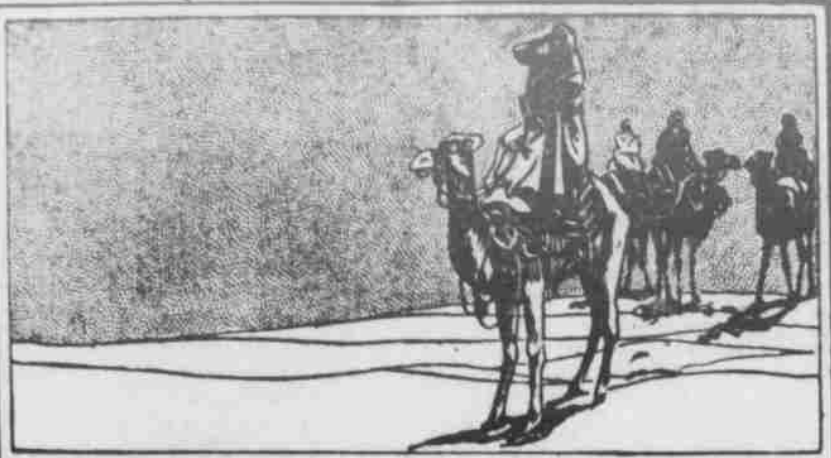




The pet from Carp Bagdad

by HAROLD MAC GRATH
Author of HEARTS AND MASKS
THE MAN ON THE BOX etc.
Illustrations by M. G. KETNER
COPYRIGHT 1911 BY BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY



Vitality Important to Meet Him at Nine O'Clock at the English-Bar.

SYNOPSIS.

George Percival Algonquin Jones, vice-president of the Metropolitan Oriental Rug Company of New York, thrifting for romance, is in Cairo on a business trip. Horace Ryanne arrives at the hotel in Cairo with a carefully guarded bundle. Ryanne sells Jones the famous holy Yhiordees rug which he admits having stolen from a pasha at Bagdad. Jones meets Major Callahan and later is introduced to Fortune Chedsoye, by a woman to whom he had loaned \$50 pounds at Monte Carlo some months previously, and who turns out to be Fortune's mother. Jones takes Mrs. Chedsoye and Fortune to a polo game. Fortune returns to Jones the money borrowed by her mother. Mrs. Chedsoye appears to be engaged in some mysterious enterprise unknown to the laity. Ryanne interests Jones in the United Romance and Adventure company, a concern which for a price will arrange any kind of an adventure to order. Mrs. Chedsoye, her brother, Major Callahan, Wallace and Ryanne, as the United Romance and Adventure company, plan a risky enterprise involving Jones. Ryanne makes known to Mrs. Chedsoye his intention to marry Fortune. Mrs. Chedsoye declares she will not permit it. Plans are laid to prevent Jones sailing for home. Ryanne steals Jones' letters and cable dispatches. He wires agent in New York, in Jones' name, that he is visiting house in New York to some friends. Mahomed, keeper of the holy carpet, is on Ryanne's trail. Ryanne promises Fortune that he will see that Jones comes to no harm as a result of his purchase of the rug. Mahomed accuses Ryanne and demands the Yhiordees rug. Ryanne tells him Jones has the rug and suggests the abduction of the New York merchant as a means of securing its return. The rug disappears from Jones' room. Fortune quarrels with her mother when the latter refuses to explain her mysterious actions.

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

She had gone scarcely a hundred yards when she was accosted by a tall Arab whom she instinctively recollected having seen before; where, she could not definitely imagine. It was the ragged green turban that cleared away her puzzlement. The Arab was the supposed beggar over whom Percival (how easily she had fallen into the habit of calling him that!) had stumbled. He stood so tall and straight that she knew he wasn't going to beg; so naturally she stopped. Without a word, without even a look that expressed anything, he slipped a note into her hand, bowed with Oriental gravity, and stepped aside for her to proceed. She read the note hastily as she continued her way. Horace? Why should he wish to meet her that evening, at the southeast corner of the Shar'a Mahomoud-El-Falaki, a step from the British Consulate? And she mustn't come in a carriage nor tell any one where she was going? Why all such childish mystery? He could see her far more conveniently in the lounging-room of the hotel. She tore the note into scraps and flung them upon the air. She was afraid. She was almost certain why he wished to meet her where neither her mother's nor her uncle's eye would be within range. Should she meet him? Deeper than this, dared she? Why had she come to Cairo, when at Mentone she had known peace, such peace as destiny was generous enough to dole out to her? And now, out of this tolerable peace, a thousand hands were reaching to rend her heart, to wring it. She decided quickly. Since she had come this far, to go on to the end would add but little to her burden. Better to know all too soon than too late.

That the note had not been directed to her and that she was totally unfamiliar with Ryanne's handwriting, jumped her. She had too many other

things upon her mind to see all things clearly, especially such trifles. She finished her walk, returning by the way she had gone, gave the key to the lift-boy, and in her room dropped down upon the bed, dried-eyed and weary. The most eventful day she had ever known.

And all the while George sat by the window and watched, and at length fell into a frame of mind that was irritable, irascible and self-condemnatory. And when he found that his precious Yhiordees was gone, his condition was the essence of all disagreeable emotions. It was beyond him how any one could have stolen it. He never failed to lock his door and leave the key with the porter. And surely, only a man with wings could have gained entrance by the window. Being a thorough business man among other accomplishments, he reported his loss at once to the management; and the management set about the matter with celerity. At half after seven every maid and servant in the hotel had been questioned and examined, without the least noticeable result. The rug was nowhere to be found. George felt the loss keenly. He was not so rich that he could afford to lose both the rug and the thousand pounds he had paid for it. His first thought had been of Ryanne; but it was proved that Ryanne had not been in the hotel since morning; at least, no one had seen him.

George gloomed about. A beastly day, all told; everything had gone wrong, and all because he had overslept. At dinner something was wrong with the soup; the fish was greasy; the roast was dry and stringy; the wine, full of pieces of cork. Out into the lounging-room again; and then the porter hurried over to him with a note from Ryanne. It stated briefly that it was vitally important for Mr. Jones to meet him at nine o'clock at the English-Bar in the Quarter Rosetti. Any driver would show him the way. Mohamed-El-Gebel, the guardian of the Holy Yhiordees, had turned up, and the band was beginning to play. Would Mr. Jones like a little fun by the wayside?

"I'm his man," said George. "But how the devil did this Mahomed ever get into my room?"

Had Fortune dined down-stairs instead of alone in her room, events might have turned out differently. Ryanne had really written to George, but not to Fortune.

Mahomed, fatalist that he was, had thrown everything upon the whirling scales of chance, and waited. Later, he may have congratulated himself upon his good luck. But it wasn't luck; it was the will of Allah that he, Mahomed, should contribute his slender share in working out the destinies of two young people.

George was in the proper mood for an adventure. He went so far as to admit to himself that he would have liked nothing better than a fisticuff. The one mistake he made in his calculations was dress. Men didn't generally go a-venturing in such finical attire. They wore bowlers and sack-coats and carried heavy walking-sticks. The only weapons George had were his two hands, now adorned with snug-fitting opera-gloves.

He saw Mrs. Chedsoye, spoke to her.

inquired about Fortune, and was informed that she had dined in her room. A case of doldrums, Mrs. Chedsoye believed.

"I'm in a peck of trouble," said George, craving a little sympathy.

"In what way?"

"The rug I told you about is gone."

"What? Stolen?"

"Yes. Vanished into thin air."

"That's too bad. Of course the police will eventually find it for you."

"I'm afraid that's exactly the trouble. I really haven't put the case in the hands of the police."

"Oh, I see," Mrs. Chedsoye looked profoundly sorry.

"And here I am due for Port Said tomorrow."

"That's the kind that bowls you over," said the Major. "If there is anything I can do after you are gone."

"Oh, I shouldn't think of bothering you, thanks, though."

"You must have lost your key," suggested Mrs. Chedsoye.

"No. It's been hanging up in the porter's bureau all day."

"Well, I hope you find the rug," said the Major, with a sly glance at his sister.

"Thanks. I must be off. The chap I bought it of says that the official guardian from Bagdad has arrived, and that there's likely to be some sport. I'm to meet him at a place called the English-Bar."

"The English-Bar?" The Major shook his head. "A low place, if I remember."

"And you are going dressed like that?" asked Mrs. Chedsoye.

"Haven't time to change." He excused himself and went in search of a carriage.

"The play begins, Kate," whispered the Major. "This Hodge of ours is a wonderful chap."

"Poor fellow!"

"What? Hodge?"

"No; Percival. He'll be very uncomfortable in patent-leather pumps."

The Major laughed light-heartedly. "I suppose we might telegraph for reservation on the Ludwig."

"I shall pack at once. Fortune can find her way to Mentone from Naples. I am beginning to worry about that girl. She has a temper; and she is beginning to have some ideas."

"Marry her, marry her! How much longer must I preach that sermon? She's growing handsomer every day, too. Watch your laurels, Kate."

Mrs. Chedsoye inspected her rings. Meanwhile, George directed his driver to go post-haste to the English-Bar. That he found it more or less of a dive in nowise alarmed him. He had been in places of more frightful aspect. As Ryanne had written him to make inquiries of the barmaid relative to finding him, he did so. She jerked her head toward the door at the rear. George went boldly to it, opened it, and stepped inside.

And vanished from the haunts of men.

CHAPTER XII.

The Caravan in the Desert.

Yes, George vanished from the haunts of men as completely as if the Great Roc had dropped him into the Valley of Diamonds and left him there; and as nobody knows just where the Valley of Diamonds is, George was very well lost. Still, there was, at the end of a most unique experience, a recompense far beyond its value. But, of course, George, being without the gift of clairvoyance, saw nothing save the immediate and imminent circumstances: a door that banged behind him, portentously; a sack, a cloak, a burnouse, or whatever it was, flung about his head, and smelling evilly.

George hit out valiantly, and a merry scuffle ensued. The room was small; at least, George thought it was, for in the space of one minute he thumped against the four sides of it. He could see nothing and he couldn't breathe very well; but in spite of these inconveniences he put up three rounds that would have made some stir among the middleweights. In the phraseology of the fancy, he had a good punch. All the disappointments of the day seemed to become so many pounds of steam in his shoulder; and he was aware of a kind of barbaric joy whenever he hit some one. All the circumspection of years, all of the gentle blood of his peaceful forbears, gave way to the strain which still lurks in the blood of civilized humanity, even in the veins of poets and persons. He fought with all the tactics of a sailor in a bar-room, not overnicely.

A table toppled over with a smashing noise. George and his assailant fell in a heap beside it. Thwack! Bang! George struggled to his feet and tugged at the stifling envelope. Some one jumped upon his back, Old Man of the Sea style. A savage elbow jabbed at his ribs. And

then the racket began all over again. George never paused mentally to wonder what all this rumpus was about; time enough to make inquiries as the scrimmage. Intrepidly, as Hereward the Wake, as Bussy d'Ambois, as Porthos in the cave of Loch-Maria, George fought. He wasn't a trained athlete; he hadn't any science; he was simply ordinarily tough and active and clean-lived; and the injustice of an unprovoked assault added to physical prowess a full measure of nervous energy. It was quasi-Homer-ic: a modern young gentleman in evening dress holding off for several minutes five sleek, sinewy, unhampered Arabs. But the days of the gods were no more; and no quick-witted goddess cast a veil across the eyes of the Arabs. No; George had to shift for himself. Suddenly there came a general rush from the center of the room into one of the right-angular corners. The subsequent snarl of legs and arms was not unlike that seen upon the football field. George was the man with the ball. And then to George came merciful darkness. The conjunction, as in astronomy, of two planets in the same degree of the Zodiac—meaning George's head and the stucco-wall—gave the Arabs complete mastery of the field of battle.

From the opposite side of the room came the voice of the referee: "Curses of Allah upon these white dogs! How they fight!" And Mahomed peered down into the corner.

One by one the Arabs got up, each examining his honorable wounds. George alone remained unmoved, quiet and disinterested, under the folds of the tattered burnouse.

"Is he dead?" demanded Mahomed.

"No, my father. His head hit the wall."

"Hasten, then. Bind his feet and hands and cover his eyes and mouth. We have but little time."

There was a long way to go, and Mahomed was too wise and cautious to congratulate himself at this early stage. George was thereupon trussed up like a Christmas fowl ready for the oven. They wrapped him up in the burnouse and carried him out to the closed carriage in waiting. No one in the street seemed curious. No one in the English-Bar deemed it necessary to be. Whatever happened in this resort had long been written in the book of fate. Had a white man approached to inquire what was going on, Mahomed would have gravely whispered that it was a case of plague they were hurrying away to prevent interference by the English authorities.

Once George was snug inside the carriage, it was driven off at a run toward the tombs of the caliphs. As the roads were not the levellest, the vehicle went most of the way upon two wheels. Mahomed sat beside his victim, watchful and attentive. His intention was to take him no farther than the outskirts of the city, force him to send back to the hotel a duly credited messenger for the rug, after which he would turn George adrift, with the reasonable assurance that the young man would find some one to guide him back to the hotel. After a while he observed that George had recovered and was grimly fighting the imprisoning ropes.

"You will need your strength," interposed Mahomed gently. "If I take the cloth from your mouth, will you promise not to cry out?" There was an affirmative nod, and Mahomed untied the bandage. "Listen. I mean you no harm. If you will send to the hotel for the Holy Yhiordees, you will be liberated the moment it is put into my hands."

"Go to the deuce!" snapped George, still dizzy. The fighting mood hadn't evaporated, by any means. "You know where it is better than I." So this was Mahomed?

"Fool!" cried the other, shaking George roughly.

"Easy there! I had the rug, but it was stolen this afternoon." He was very weak and tired. "And if I had it, I shouldn't give it to you," with renewed truculence; "and you may put that in your water-pipe and smoke it."

Mahomed, no longer pacific, struck George violently upon the mouth. He, on his part, was unkindly enough to attempt to sink his teeth in the brutal hand. Queer fancies flit through a man's head in times like this; for the ineffectuality of the bite reminded him of Hallowe'en's and the tubs with the bobbing apples. One thing was certain: he would kill this pagan the very first opportunity. Rather a startling metamorphosis in the character of a man whose life had been passed in the peacefullest environments. And to kill him without the least compunction, too. To strike a man who couldn't help himself!

"Hey there!" he yelled. "Help for a white man!" After such treatment he considered it anything but dishon-

orable to break his parole. And where was Ryanne? "Help!"

Mahomed swung his arm round George's neck, and the third cry began with a gurgle and ended with a sigh. Deftly, the Arab rebanded the prisoner's mouth. So be it. He had had his chance for freedom; now he should drink to the bottom of the bitter cup, along with the others. He had no real enmity against George; he was simply one of the pawns in the game he was playing. But now he saw that there was danger in liberating him. The other! Mahomed caressed his wiry beard. To subject him to the utmost mental agony; to break him physically, too; to pay him back pound for penny; to bruise, to hurt, to rack him, that was all Mahomed desired.

George made no further effort to free himself, nor apparently to bestir himself about the future. Somewhere in the fight, presumably as he fell against the table, he had received a crushing blow in the small ribs; and when Mahomed threw him back, he fainted for the second time in his life. He reclined limply in the corner of the carriage, the bosom of his shirt bulging open; for the thrifty Arabs had pilloined the pearl-studs, the gold collar-buttons, and the sapphire cuff-links. And consciousness returned only when they lifted him out and dropped him inconsiderately into the thick dust of the road. He stirred again at his bonds, but presently lay still. The pain in his side hurt keenly, and he wasn't sure that the rib was whole. What time had passed since his entrance to the English-Bar was beyond his reckoning, but he knew that it was yet in the dark of night, as no light whatever penetrated the cloth over his eyes. That he was somewhere outside the city he was assured by the tang of the winter wind. He heard low voices—Arabic; and while he possessed a smattering of the tongue, his head ached too sharply for him to sense a word. Later, a camel coughed. Camels? And where were they taking him upon a camel? Bagdad? Impossible: there were too many white men following the known camel-ways. He groaned a little, but the sound did not reach the ears of his captors. To ride a camel under ordinary conditions was a painful affair; but to straddle the ungainly brute, dressed as he was, in a swallow-tail and paper-thin pumps, did not promote any pleasurable thoughts. They would in all truth kill him before they got through. Hang the rug!

was it, since he was now certain that Mahomed had it not? It was Ryanne; Ryanne, smooth and plausible of tongue. Not being satisfied with a thousand pounds, he had stolen it again to mulct some other simple, trustful person. George, usually so unsuspicious, was now quite willing to believe anything of anybody.

He felt himself being lifted to his feet. The rope round his ankles was thrown off. His feet stung under the renewed flow of blood. He waited for them to liberate his hands, but the galling rope was not disturbed. It was evident that the natives still entertained some respect for his fighting ability. Next, they boosted him, dung a leg here and a leg there; then came a lurch backward, the recurrence of the pain in his side, and he knew that he was upon the back of a camel, desert-bound. There were stirrups, and as life began to spread vigor once more through his legs, he found the steel. The straps were too short, and in time the upper turn of the steel chafed his insteps. He eased himself by riding sideways, the proper way to ride a camel, but with constant straining to keep his balance without the use of his hands. Fortunately, they were not traveling very fast, otherwise, what with the stabbing pains in his side, produced by the unvarying dog-trot, he must have fallen. He was miserable, yet defiant; tears of anger and pain filled his eyes and burned down his cheeks in spite of the cloth.

And he, poor fool, had always been longing for an adventure, a taste of life outside the peaceful harbor where in he had sailed his cat-boat! Well, here he was, in the deep-sea water; and he read himself so truly that he knew the adventure he had longed for had been the cut-and-dried affairs of story-tellers, in which only the villains were seriously discommoded, and everything ended happily. A dashing hero he was, to be sure! Why hadn't he changed his clothes? Was there ever such an ass? Ryanne had told him that there was likely to be sport; and yet he had left the hotel as one dressed for the opera. Ass! And to-morrow the Ludwig would sail without him.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

All About Nothing.

Some of the saddest "misunderstandings" in life have arisen all about nothing. Looking backward, we cannot think why we were so angry of what our friend could see in our words



And Then to George Came Merciful Darkness.

And doubly hang the man who had sold it to him!

His whilom friend, conscience, came back and gibbered at him. Once he said: "Don't do it!" and now she was saying quite humanly: "I told you so!" Hadn't she warned him? Hadn't she swung her red lantern under his very nose? Well, she hoped he was satisfied. His reply to this brief jeremiad was that if ever he got his hands upon the rug again, he would hang on till the crack of doom, and conscience herself could go hang. Mere perverseness, probably. And where

to be so bitterly offended. Great wrongs may be righted, and the sky be clear again, but the "all about nothing" quarrels have a way of lasting indefinitely. There is nothing to explain, and nothing to apologize for, we tell ourselves; the whole thing was "too silly for words." Exactly so; and it is a pity we did not think of this at the time.

After Piece.

The man who has to eat his own words has crow for dessert.—Washington Post.